

July 15, 2009

I understand the hope of my colleague from Texas to rein in excessive government spending, but he is really misguided on this one.

This is a project that would provide real benefit to the residents of the Borough of South River, and as a demonstration project it would serve as an example for the rest of New Jersey and the Northeast and indeed the whole Nation of how to use technology to conserve energy, to use it more wisely. In fact, every dollar spent, to paraphrase my friend here, on smart metering, is indeed a dollar well spent.

My constituents in New Jersey pay some of the highest utility rates in the Nation. In the Borough of South River, they are seeking assistance to help decrease the electric bills of the borough residents, and they're seeking to demonstrate that this works. Funding for the automated remote electric project will provide relief to the constituents in this municipal energy system, and it will serve as a wonderful example.

South River owns and operates its own utilities. It's moving toward implementing a borough-wide smart grid. This metering that the borough intends to purchase is the first step toward this eventual goal. They would provide real-time consumption information. It would allow the users to make wise decisions based on the real cost of service in real time.

It's just exactly what we have been discussing here in the House of Representatives in recent weeks. It's well established in the scientific community that climate change of recent decades can be attributed to the way we produce and use energy and that climate change is altering our planet in ways that are expensive and deadly.

I spoke to the mayor of South River yesterday, who assured me that he is ready to go ahead with the project. It's one of their top priorities. They have been working on it for years, one in which they have already made considerable investment in preparing an efficient municipal utility.

This will serve, as I say, as an example.

I might add that the gentleman's home State of Texas ranks 32nd in the Nation in tax dollars returned from Washington. My home State of New Jersey ranks considerably lower than that. As a so-called donor State, I don't apologize to my constituents for working to return their tax dollars. I really only regret that all municipal utilities in the country are not funded to convert to smart metering. This is certainly a good investment.

Let me try to figure out why it is that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. *Hensarling*) is proposing to do this. I can assure, I think it is unlikely that he knows as much about this project as I do, but I must say energy has been my professional field for most of my life.

This is, I would argue, a good investment. To refer to the comments of my colleague from Massachusetts a while ago, this approach of trying to deal with the deficit and excess spending one project at a time is sort of a waste. If the gentleman is really concerned about this, I presume that we will find his vote in the ``aye" column next week when we consider pay-as-you-go legislation.

If he's concerned about earmarks, as a concept, then I would say, yes, the OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, speaking on behalf of the White House, should have included this project in their request to Congress and many more like it. But they didn't.

And so, is the gentleman saying that the House of Representatives should just be an up-or-down vote on what the President sends to us? The President will decide what the budget should be. We take it or leave it.

Well, no, that's not the way it should work. This is something that I offer. It provides no partisan political advantage. In fact, the mayor of this town is from the other party. No one from the borough, to my knowledge, has made any campaign contribution to any Member of Congress, any member of the borough government. No lobbyist is involved in this.

This is just good policy. It should have been in the budget sent over by the President, but it wasn't. Lots of things should be in the budget sent over by the President, but they're not. That's why we scrub the budget and decide what should be added and what should be subtracted. Call it earmarking if you want, but I don't. I would hope that the gentleman would not think that we should abdicate our responsibilities here as Members.